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ABSTRACT

As part of a symposium on issues related to diversity and American education reform in the context of Goal 3 of the National Education Goals, this paper addresses public attitudes about languages that are different from official or national languages. It is noted that the use of a native language as the medium of instruction to rebuild historical languages among Native peoples where those languages are being lost is gaining support among Native leaders, parents, and educators for social, educational, and cultural reasons. Focus is on three educational models that the American Indian, Native Alaskan, and Native Hawaiian have experienced: the Klawock model in Alaska (Tlingit language and culture), the Lower Kuskokwim School District model (Yup'ik language and culture), and the Punana Leo Hawaiian Language Preschool and Kaiapuni Hawai'i Public Hawaiian Language Schools model. A proposal for a community-based model of education is presented that begins will local knowledge and skills as a base from which to improve schools and schooling for Native children. It is concluded that the national goals must be consistent with the goals of the nation's local schools and communities which challenging us to build a multicultural, pluralistic society. Appended are 10 National Education Goals for American Indians and Alaska Natives. Contains 10 references. (LB)

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# LANGUAGE, LEARNING, AND NATIONAL GOALS: A NATIVE AMERICAN VIEW

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The development of a person's language skills has long been recognized as necessary to building one's intellectual abilities and to achieving success in schooling and the academic community. In the United States (and the Americas in general), Native Americans have experienced policies established by governments that have fluctuated between the destruction of their heritage languages and the relearning of those languages for cultural and social, as well as academic reasons. Practical experience in the last 500 years demonstrates that the public's attitudes and practices concerning language in the academic and social setting significantly influence what indigenous peoples do with their historical languages for cultural reasons (Indian Nations at Risk Task Force, 1991).

More recently the use of a youngster's Native language as the medium of instruction in his/her education, when it is the language of the home, has gained recognition among educators as important in developing that youngster's intellectual skills. The use of a Native language as the medium of instruction to rebuild historical languages among Native peoples where those languages are being lost is gaining support among Native leaders, parents, and educators for social, educational, and cultural reasons (Indian Nations at Risk Task Force, 1991; Title I, Public Law 101-477, Native American Languages Act of 1990).

What we have learned about developing a person's language base, the importance of language to cognitive and intellectual development, and the role of languages in the economies of industrial nations, requires all of us, including the Native community, to step back and consider what is happening in our schools, what has happened to our children's attitudes about Native languages, and what is happening in government policy with regard to aboriginal languages not spoken by the majority or economically dominant population.

We must also take a closer look at the relationships of language to academic performance. We must develop a clear understanding of the public attitudes about languages that are different from official or national languages. Let us look at what we have learned in the Native community by reviewing three educational models that I am familiar with, models that the American Indian, Native Alaskan, and Native Hawaiian have all experienced.

## The Klawock Model

In 1967 in the small Native village of Klawock, Alaska, the new superintendent of schools believed that there was a direct connection between respect for the local Native language and culture and an understanding of the traditional, historical mores, on the one hand, and academic and social success in school on the other. In addition, he felt that the local knowledge base could be passed on to the students by community language experts, historians, and parents. A majority of the teachers in the school held and supported a similar position. The people in the village were split, with a majority of the community leadership and a majority of the parents excited about the whole idea.

The model that was developed began with informal discussions between the superintendent and teachers about how the school curriculum needed to change in order to better accommodate more community participation and Tlingit language and cultural activity.

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There was some discussion with several of the local elders, the school board (all local Native parents), and the local Native organization that focused on social, political, and cultural issues (Klawock Alaska Native Sisterhood). After those preliminary discussions the superintendent met with a small group of the teachers and developed a detailed plan in the form of several applications for supplementary monies for salaries and for honoraria for community experts.

The original plans naturally changed as ideas were expanded or modified to fit funding requirements for a variety of federal programs. The program as implemented included a summer program to train parents of schoolchildren as teacher aides. The program was planned and implemented by the local teachers. This part of the program included additional winter and summer classes for academic credit for the teacher aides who wished to expand their knowledge base through formal instruction. The activities allowed the community participants to work towards teacher certification. Two of the original six parents became certified teachers. A third became the director of an early childhood education program that survives today. A local Native recognized as an expert in the Tlingit language and several elders knowledgeable about the art, dance, and legends of the Tlingit were identified and recruited.

The superintendent and several teachers worked with the language expert to develop a schedule, to create a curriculum, and to discuss teaching and organizational strategies. The community elders recruited for teaching the art and music of the Tlingit did not go through any formal preparation other than what they organized themselves for after-school activities. Each elder presenting legends and other cultural activities in the classroom was separately coached by the individual teachers. The local Native custodian was allowed to sit and meet with the parents and elders to outline a daily schedule for after-school activity.

The school was open every evening from 7:00 to 10:00 pm Monday through Friday. The students from kindergarten through grade 8 spent at least two days a week on language instruction, listening to legends, and singing activity, and almost every day in some project associated with music and the visual arts. The students also spent evenings working on their art projects and Native dancing. At the end of the school year a major presentation was made by the students for the community. In this program the students danced, sang, and wore the traditional costumes each of them made with the help of parents and elders.

Sometime during early spring the local post office mistress (a local Native community leader) cornered the superintendent and said "I don't know what you are doing in the school this year, but I've spent years watching the children go past the post office on their way to school. They almost always played around, taking as long as possible and only running when the last bell rang so they wouldn't be too late. They now go to school early, wait for the doors to open, and no longer dilly-dally. Even the kids that are sick will not stay home and insist on going to school."

A very important component was added to the Klawock program in 1973 by a proposal initiated by the same superintendent and local Native leaders. This was the planning and development of a community-based early childhood education program. This program included parenting activities, English language development, and some cultural activity. In addition, the local village Native corporation established a scholarship fund for postsecondary education that includes both technical/vocational and university scholarships. (Information from personal involvement as the superintendent, and telephone interview with Morris Ververs, superintendent of the school, 1992.)

Over the years the Native language and cultural program in Klawock eroded, but according to the current superintendent, a refocus on the program, concentrating on quality, has improved the overall climate of opinion towards the school and schooling.

In Klawock's annual report and educational plan one finds that over the past five years there has been less than a one percent dropout rate (three or four students) with 50 percent of the students going on to college. The superintendent estimates that about one-half of those going to college will finish with their undergraduate degree (Klawock Public Schools, 1992).

## The Lower Kuskokwim School District Model

In Bethel, Alaska the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) developed the Primary Eskimo Program in the late 1960s under the U.S. Office of Education's original Title I Elementary and Secondary Education Act monies. When the transfer of schools from BIA to state public schools occurred in the late 1980s, the newly created state public school district continued the program.

This model created by the Bureau of Indian Affairs included an intensive summer and continuing education component for associate Native Yup'ik teachers and white teachers that served as supervisors for the associate teachers. Kindergarten students were taught in Yup'ik by certified Native teachers or by associate teachers under the general supervision of non-Yup'ik-speaking teachers. This was done because of the lack of Native speakers for the classroom. The kindergarten students spent all but 30 minutes of the day in class with Yup'ik as the language of instruction. In the first grade, four hours of instruction were in Yup'ik and one hour in English. The second graders spent three hours in Yup'ik as the language of instruction, with three hours in English. In the third grade, the percentages were reversed and only one hour was devoted to Yup'ik as the language of the classroom, with four hours devoted to English. In the fourth grade the language for the class became all English.

One of the most time-consuming and difficult components of the program was the development of appropriate curriculum for the K-3 grades. According to the superintendent, this problem currently serves as a barrier to expanding Yup'ik as the language of instruction to the middle school. The high school has adopted the teaching of Yup'ik as a subject, in the same way foreign languages are taught.

When the transfer of schools from the BIA to a public school district took place, the new school district found it too expensive to continue the extensive training and inservice program. In the past three to four years, the school board substituted a career ladder opportunity for associate teachers interested in certification to pursue a regular college degree in teaching after accumulating 60 hours of college credit towards a degree.

Several components have been added since the program's original conception. Community preschool programs were begun, using Yup'ik as their language of instruction. These programs now number 14 preschool programs, out of 23 schools in the district. In the high school, in addition to the Yup'ik language class, a life skills curriculum has been developed. The elders of the community, with help from the associate teachers, developed the life skills component and curriculum.

Under the current structure, each village school board must approve the language and cultural focus in order for it to become part of that local school's curriculum. Each program is individually tailored to meet the respective community priorities and beliefs about the role of Native languages and culture in the class.

The Lower Kuskokwim school district superintendent believes that at least two-thirds of the parents and community leaders support the program. The April 1992 assessment of the 1991 high school graduates shows that 26 percent of the students who went on to college were still in school. In addition, the number of Yup'ik-speaking certified teachers has grown from 23 in 1988 to 42 in 1992.

The current superintendent was a teacher in the system when the program was initiated. As a teacher and superintendent she has had 25 years' experience in the school district. She believes that the standardized tests administered as part of a state-required testing program do not accurately report the academic skills developed by the students. The tests are also not a predictor of success in college for the students who choose to continue their education. She believes that extending the early childhood education program to all villages is an important goal for improving academic performance and strengthening the program. (Personal knowledge and telephone interview with Sue Hare, superintendent of the school, 1992.)

## The Punana Leo Hawaiian Language Preschool and Kaiapuni Hawai'i Public Hawaiian Language Schools Model

The Punana Leo Hawaiian Language Preschool Program (modeled after the Maori Kohanga Reo program in New Zealand) was initiated in 1984. It is an indigenous language immersion preschool program. All instruction is conducted in Hawaiian with English not allowed on the school grounds. As children graduated from the Punana Leo, the program expanded to public elementary schools as the Kaiapuni Hawai'i Hawaiian Immersion Program. All instruction, including instruction in English, is through the Hawaiian language. In January 1992, the State Board of Education approved the continuation of the Hawaiian Immersion program through high school.

There are Punana Leo preschools in all four counties of the state. They are run by the communities in which they are located, in partnership with a state board of Hawaiian-speaking educators, and the Hale Kuamo'o Hawaiian language center of the University of Hawaii at Hilo. University classes train teachers, parents, and traditional students in the Hawaiian language, culture, and traditional teaching methods. University students serve as aides in the Punana Leo and Kaiapuni Hawai'i sites, work in after-school and summer programs for the children, and help produce curricula. Students also teach parent groups, since Punana Leo parents are required, and Kaiapuni Hawai'i parents are encouraged, to study Hawaiian in order to support use of Hawaiian in the home.

The approximately 500 children in these programs typically come from English-speaking homes, since Hawaiian is now the natural language of only great-grandparents and some grandparents. Exceptions are children raised speaking Hawaiian either by parents who learned Hawaiian in the university or by parents with connections to a tiny community of 1200 people who still speak Hawaiian as their daily language.

Hawaiian is an official language of the State of Hawaii, and all public elementary schools must teach some of the language to students. The special Kaiapuni Hawai'i programs are often a Hawaiian language stream in a school that otherwise uses English as the medium of instruction. Non-Hawaiian children are accepted in the special Hawaiian programs, but at present non-Hawaiian students number less than one percent. The Kaiapuni Hawai'i programs where some English is taught are seen as balancing the English-medium programs where some Hawaiian is taught. The impetus for the Punana Leo and

Kaiapuni Hawai'i was the lack of success of the Hawaiian language classes in the typical English-medium program in producing children truly fluent and literate in Hawaiian.

Because all children in the Hawaiian-medium programs already speak English, formal English instruction is restricted to one hour daily of English literacy training, beginning in the fifth grade. The children are performing at grade level or above in English as well as in Hawaiian. For 1992, the State fifth grade free verse poetry contest winner was a student from a Hawaiian immersion program, and other students were designated gifted and talented in English. (*Ke Kuamo'o*, 1992)

The students from preschool through grade 6 (the top grade at present) are excited about school, about life. The classes are well organized and action packed, with traditional music and poetry as a basic component for the youngsters' daily activity. The instructors and parents are totally committed to seeing that every student succeeds and that Hawaiian ideals and values are upheld in the daily schedule of the children. As the youngsters move through the program (from preschool up through the grades) their command of English develops as their command of Hawaiian is strengthened. (Personal knowledge and personal communication with Bill Wilson.) Again, the absence of curriculum for the preschool as well as for the elementary school grades is seen as a problem.

Producing enough teachers through the university and finding sites to develop or expand programs like those in Alaska and Hawaii which have been described here, continue to be a challenge. An important part of all the programs mentioned is the developmental nature of the locally created curriculum. The process of learning for the teachers and for the students is enhanced as they jointly work on materials and texts. Where parents and elders participate, their development is also enhanced.

The administrators of these early childhood, elementary school, and university programs are constantly struggling for adequate and continued funding. From my observations, the participating students are succeeding academically, socially, and culturally in percentages far above the norm for the majority of Native students generally in the United States and in the Circumpolar North.

As the Native American Communities (American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian) search for ways to enhance the academic performance of students, strengthen their Native heritage language base, and retain those aspects of the earlier cultures that are still important to their identity as Native, the three models above (and others like them) must be observed closely and described objectively to help all of us better understand the characteristics of these programs that are important to their success.

## Proposal for a Community-Based Model of Education

We know what the research says about early childhood education, about effective schooling, about community attitudes and support, and about language as key to academic, social, and cultural development. We have learned what not to do in the last 500 years of domination by visitors from other places. We have learned that many of our own experiences in training the young over thousands of years included practices that the researcher of today is finally recognizing as important to success in training and educating today's youth and preparing them for their role as adults.

My grandmother knew that a young girl's diet was important to the health of any children she would bear as a young mother; that it was important to let young children explore to satisfy their curiosity; that it was necessary to develop their physical skills early; that it is critical to have extended opportunity to lis-

ten to oral speech and practice that speech. The Tlingit learned early in their history that paternal uncles and other members of the family were important partners in the educational process young children experienced, for these mentors would not tolerate failure. In the Tlingit culture everyone was expected to succeed in developing the skills and in learning the knowledge important to their participation as members of the larger society and to their culture. My ancestors were eager to gain new knowledge, to benefit from the skills and information that people from outside the community could offer. We know that local knowledge is important, but that there is much to learn from other communities.

**The national goals must be consistent with goals of the nation's local schools and communities while challenging us to build a multicultural, pluralistic society.**

In that context I would propose a model of education that begins with local knowledge and skills as a base from which to improve schools and schooling for Native children.

I have a friend that sent me a draft article in 1986 that described a community-based education model that incorporated much of what the effective programs mentioned above practice. It was innovative, well thought out, and relevant for improving schools today. It included the identification of a theme for the school, a traditional activity central to the community. It included the use of the traditional leaders, the skilled hunters, the artists, and the linguists of the community. It was designed to incorporate modern technology and knowledge in a way that would build upon the language and cultural base of the community rather than tear it down. It was designed to build upon the strengths of the community.

Her idea was to build a curriculum around whaling as an activity central to the community. The school would use that activity as the core of the educational program. The school and community would build the academic program around the life cycle of the whale, around the village activity surrounding the whale, and strengthen their cultural identity as a base for developing the skills important to the 21st century. The science, the mathematics, the language arts, the curriculum of the school would all tie back to the central activity of whaling. The community's economic ties, social activity, cultural base, and language would all be strengthened while being reflected in the curriculum. The villagers would be active participants in the educational process, and the students would have local adult models representing both local and academic professionals to learn from. The best in modern equipment would be available to incorporate into the schooling process. Interactive video, computers, and computerized library and research systems would be available for use by students and teachers alike. Part of the learning process would be enhanced by the process of developing the curriculum (the texts, the teaching materials, the pedagogy of the classroom).

It is a model that would concentrate on the Native language as the language of instruction. It would build a partnership between the school and community, it would make use of modern technology and materials, it would begin the curriculum using the wisdom of local experts and knowledge, it would bring in the knowledge and experiences of the broader world, and it would train the Native and non-Native teachers alike to work with the curriculum and

the students and parents of the community. It would provide each community the opportunity to identify a central theme and activity central to the community. It would build a program that is designed to meet the community's priorities (MacLean, 1986 and telephone interview, 1992).

As we begin to meet the local goals and priorities of our local communities and schools, I believe we will begin reaching our nation's goals and priorities for schools. The national goals must be consistent with goals of the nation's local schools and communities while challenging us to build a new society—a multicultural, pluralistic society where mutual respect and understanding eliminate prejudice and discrimination; where the political power, the economic power, the social power and structure are not dependent upon race, ethnic origin, or gender, but upon what each of us has to offer to our community, to the nation, and to the world communities.

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In addition to the above publications, descriptions of the three programs were based upon my personal recollections as the superintendent (for the Klawock model) and upon revisions suggested by each of the current superintendents in the school districts discussed, as well as revisions suggested by William Wilson. Edna MacLean generously agreed to having her proposed model summarized for this paper.

## Appendix

### National Education Goals for American Indians and Alaska Natives

**Goal 1:** Readiness for School

By the year 2000 all Native children will have access to early childhood education programs that provide the language, social, physical, spiritual, and cultural foundations they need to succeed in school and to reach their full potential as adults.

**Goal 2:** Maintain Native Languages and Cultures

By the year 2000 all schools will offer Native students the opportunity to maintain and develop their tribal languages and will create a multicultural environment that enhances the many cultures represented in the school.

**Goal 3:** Literacy

By the year 2000 all Native children in school will be literate in the language skills appropriate for their individual levels of development. They will be competent in their English oral, reading, listening, and writing skills.

**Goal 4:** Student Academic Achievement

By the year 2000 every Native student will demonstrate mastery of English, mathematics, science, history, geography, and other challenging academic skills necessary for an educated citizenry.

**Goal 5:** High School Graduation

By the year 2000 all Native students capable of completing high school will graduate. They will demonstrate civic, social, creative, and critical thinking skills necessary for ethical, moral, and responsible citizenship and important in modern tribal, national, and world societies.

**Goal 6:** High-Quality Native and Non-Native School Personnel

By the year 2000 the numbers of Native educators will double, and the colleges and universities that train the nation's teachers will develop a curriculum that prepares teachers to work effectively with the variety of cultures, including the Native cultures, that are served by schools.

**Goal 7:** Safe and Alcohol-Free and Drug-Free Schools

By the year 2000 every school responsible for educating Native students will be free of alcohol and drugs and will provide safe facilities and an environment conducive to learning.

**Goal 8:** Adult Education and Lifelong Learning

By the year 2000 every Native adult will have the opportunity to be literate and to obtain the necessary academic, vocational, and technical skills and knowledge needed to gain meaningful employment and to exercise the rights and responsibilities of tribal and national citizenship.

**Goal 9:** Restructuring Schools

By the year 2000 schools serving Native children will be restructured to effectively meet the academic, cultural, spiritual, and social needs of students for developing strong, healthy, self-sufficient communities.

**Goal 10:** Parental, Community, and Tribal Partnerships

By the year 2000 every school responsible for educating Native students will provide opportunities for Native parents and tribal leaders to help plan and evaluate the governance, operation, and performance of their educational programs.